



# Harpers *Magazine*

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## THE MUCKER POSE

BY JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS

**T**HIS borrowed title expresses better than any I have been able to devise for myself a problem which has recently been put to me by several of my American friends, men who on account of both their profession and positions are familiar with the more cultured portion of the American scene. The question which they put is one that I have been hesitatingly asking myself as I contrast that scene on successive returns from abroad with the one very obviously to be observed in this respect in France or England. "Why," they ask, "is it that a gentleman in America nowadays seems afraid to appear as such; that even university men try to appear uncultured; and that the pose of a gentleman and a scholar is that of the man in the street?" A few nights ago another friend of mine, a literary editor of some importance in New York, complained in the course of the evening's talk that the verbal criticism of many of the writers whom he knew had descended to the moronic classifications of "hot stuff," "bully," "rot," and so on. These writers, often meticulous in

the artistry of their own work and thoroughly competent to criticize acutely and intelligently that of others, appeared afraid to do so lest they be considered as literary poseurs. The real pose in their cases was in talking like news-agents on a railroad train; but that appeared to them to be safe, whereas vague danger lurked in conversing as would any intelligent French or English critic.

The mucker-poseurs do not content themselves with talking like uneducated half-wits. They also emulate the language and manners of the bargee and the longshoreman, although where the profanity of the latter is apt to have at least the virtue of picturesqueness, the swearing of the mucker-poseur is apt to be merely coarse. A member of a most distinguished family and a young graduate of one of our best known Eastern universities was overheard the other day in his university club in New York describing his new position in the banking world. The nearest to analysis or description of his work that this young scion of American aristocracy with every social and

educational advantage could reach was to tell his friends that it was "the God damndest most interesting job in the world." Both among men and women of the supposedly cultivated classes such profanity is much on the increase. I know of a man who has recently declined to take foreign visitors to his club for luncheon or dinner any longer on account of the unfortunate impression which would be made upon them by the hard swearing of the American gentlemen, mucker-poseurs, at the surrounding tables. One of the finest scholars in the country, a man who once had distinguished manners, has not only become extremely profane but exceedingly addicted to smutty stories, both, apparently, in the effort to make himself considered a good mixer and as a bid for popularity. If one wishes to acquire an extensive and varied vocabulary of the most modern sort, one has merely to watch the young ladies of the mucker-poseur type playing tennis at Southampton or Newport.

Again, the mucker-poseur aims to act like the lowest of muckers when he—and frequently she—gets drunk. Drinking in this country has ceased to add any charm or grace to social life. On a recent sailing from New York on the *Aquitania* at midnight I counted twelve women first-cabin passengers brought on board, all so drunk that they could not get up the gangway without help. Many years ago, when I was a small boy of twelve, I attended "Field Day" at one of the most exclusive private boarding schools in the East. In the course of the day an address was made by an old graduate on the subject of alcohol. To the surprise and horror of the clerical head of the school, the good-natured but somewhat inebriated speaker said nothing to condemn drinking but he threw out the comment, which is all I can now recall of his speech, that "when you boys do drink, remember always to get drunk like gentlemen." That is something which our present generation of drinkers have completely

forgotten. They act in country clubs in a way which would have been considered a disgrace to the patrons and patronized in a disorderly house of a generation ago. It is not a question of a mere decline in manners but of consciously striven-for pose.

In the case of the young this is more understandable, just as it is more international. I am not here concerned, however, with (or at) the vagaries of the younger and, in so many respects, admirable generation. I am concerned with their elders, men who have lived long enough to have developed personalities of their own, men who appreciate the value of cultivating both mind and manners. Why should they be afraid to appear as cultured gentlemen and assume as a protective coloration the manners and level of thought of those who are beneath them?

The question would be a futile one unless we believed that manners and culture possess genuine significance, a significance for society as a whole as well as for the individual. It is all too evident that a large proportion of the dwellers in our United States do not believe so, but there is a large minority which does. Not to do so argues a failure to think things through and ignorance of history and human nature. This article deals with the contemporary attitude of many believers, and we can but glance briefly, before passing to them, at the non-believers.

## II

One of the most suggestive methods of modern study has been the comparative. By the use of none other, however, are the unwary and the untrained so likely to come to logical grief over a *non sequitur*. The comparative study of habits and customs has revealed that both moral and social conventions have varied from age to age, from place to place, and from race to race. Immediately the unwary and untrained jump to the conclusion that

because there appear to be no eternal or universal standards of morals and manners there is, therefore, no value in a local, temporary, and but slowly changing one—a conclusion by no logical possibility to be drawn from the premises. The result of this particular and, at the moment, very popular *non sequitur* has been to cause in many persons a headlong jettisoning of their whole cargo of morals, manners, and conventions, and the bringing about of a muckerly chaos which arouses mirth or terror according to the temperament of the social observer.

It would seem as though no sane person with a knowledge of the past of his own species and any adequate insight into human nature could fail to believe in the absolute need of *some* standards, *some* established values to save us from a derelict wallowing about in the welter of sensations, impulses, attractions, and repulsions which form so much of this strange dream we call life. The standards, the values, will undoubtedly alter from time to time and from place to place; but that does not invalidate the need of having some of them at any one given time and place. Even the now much scorned minor conventions have their effective influence upon conduct, remote or proximate. A story is told of an English gentleman who was sent out as governor of an island where the entire population save for his sole self was black and savage. He dressed for his solitary dinner every night as carefully as though he were about to take a taxi to the smartest residence in Park Lane. He did so not from habit but from a knowledge of human nature. "If," he said, "I should drop this convention of civilized society, I should find myself some day having dropped one and another of the more important conventions, social and moral, and lower myself to the level of the blacks whom I govern. Evening clothes are far more important here than they ever were in London."

As for the second point, lack of culture, it is most evident in the extreme slovenliness in America in the use of the English language. There is, of course, some slang which is not slovenly but which has been born in some flash of genuine insight; and the language is always being enriched by absorbing many such words from below, much as the English aristocracy is by marrying or admitting commoners. But this is not true of the vast mass of slang words and cheap and easy expressions which are intellectually slovenly and nothing else; and anyone habitually using them impairs the keenness of his mind as much as he would the strength of his body by lolling in a hammock all his life. There is no question but that the use of slang, hackneyed phrases, and clichés worn smooth make for intellectual laziness, and if constantly used blur the sense of discrimination. The very first step toward a cultivated mind is the development of the ability rationally to discriminate, to distinguish between varying values and qualities. It is not easy, and most of us Americans rarely achieve it in the cultural field. I have often been struck by the different replies one receives from an American and a Frenchman if you ask them what sort of person so-and-so is. The American will usually find himself helpless and toss off a mere "good scout," "a great guy," "a good egg," whereas the Frenchman, with a moment's reflection, will give you in half a dozen sentences a sharply etched sketch of the man's distinctive characteristics, or what he believes to be such, and classify him accurately as to type. To describe anything accurately—book, picture, man or woman—so as to bring out their unique individual qualities, calls for mental exercise of no mean order. One has to train one's self to do it and keep in training; yet the ability to distinguish, if one of the first steps toward culture, is also, in its higher forms, one of its most perfect fruits. If one dodges every call for discrimination, if one gets no farther in

describing a book than "hot stuff," one loses the power after a while even if one ever possessed it. Slovenly language corrodes the mind.

These few observations as to manners and culture are well enough understood by any cultivated person who has had social and intellectual training and who has thought things through. He knows that there are both values and dangers in life, that some things are more valuable than others, and that if he has achieved any such social and intellectual training he cannot lower himself to the general level again without risk. If manners and culture have no value, there is no question involved, but if they have—and we shall now assume that they have—the man who possesses them is above, in those respects at least, the vast mass of men who do not possess them. Why then should he pretend not to, and assume the manners and mental lazzaronism of the crowd? It may be that there is no answer to the question, but as I find those better qualified than myself asking it, it is worth pondering over, and I have come to think that there may be three fundamental influences at work in America which will help us to solve it. One is democracy as we have it, another is business, and the third is the extreme mobility of American life.

### III

In civilization no man can live wholly to or for himself, and whoever would achieve power, influence, or success must cater to the tastes and whims of those who have the granting of these things in their hands. In a democracy, speaking broadly, those who have the power to grant are the whole people; and the minds and manners of the people as a whole are of necessity below those of the chosen few who have risen above the average level by gifts of nature or happy opportunity. Every social class everywhere has always had its own standards of morals, manners, and culture. When such classes are separated

by wide social or economic chasms, the only influences they exert upon one another are apt to be negative. Each lives in a world of its own, supported by the only public opinion for which it cares, that of its own class. Each also tends to react against the manners or morals of the other. The aristocrats of an earlier day looked down upon the common people and were more than ever satisfied with their own codes. The common people, in turn, feeling themselves despised, bolstered up their egos by despising the manners and morals of the class which looked down upon them. Much of the Puritan movement in England and elsewhere has here its roots. By no possibility could an ordinary laborer attain to the manners, social ease, or knowledge of the world of a duke. Ergo, the laborer by unconscious mental processes well understood by modern psychology, asserted his own worth by denying worth to the qualities of the classes above him. He could not have the manners of a duke, therefore, those manners were undesirable anyway. He could not travel and he could not gain the most valuable sort of education, that of association with great or cultivated men, therefore, such things were of no importance. So long as the classes remain separated, as I said above, their influence upon one another is largely negative, but when class distinctions disappear in a democracy the mutual influences of members of those former classes or their vestiges in later generations become as complex in their action as the currents where tide and river meet.

The effects of democracy in America have been emphasized by three factors not present in any of the great democracies of Europe. In the first place, the Americans started almost wholly fresh. Here were no thousand-year-old institutions and forms of government and society to be reckoned with as impediments. America was a clean slate. The settlers did indeed bring with them habits, information, and memories gained

in the old world, but they brought them to a wilderness.

In the second place, America has been built up exclusively by the middle and lower classes, from which practically all of us have descended. Scarcely a man has ever come and settled here who did not belong to one or the other; and the most distinguished American families form no exceptions. Every class in history has had its good and bad attributes which have varied with class, country, and period. The English middle class, upper and lower, from which the character of America, with some modifications, has essentially been built up, had admirable qualities but it lacked some of those enjoyed by the aristocracy. For our purpose here we need mention only one. The genuine aristocrat insists upon being himself and is disdainful of public opinion. The middle class, on the other hand, has always been notoriously timid socially. It rests in terror not only of public but even of village opinion. If the religious refugees of New England be held an exception, it may be noted that the genuine ones were far fewer than used to be supposed, and that as a whole the New England immigration may be considered as part of the great economic exodus from England which took thirty thousand Englishmen to Barbados and little St. Kitts while only twelve thousand were settling Massachusetts. Religious refugees have formed an infinitesimal part of American immigration as compared with the economic ones.

The third great influence upon American democracy has been the frontier, whose line was lapped by the waves of the Atlantic in 1640 and after retreating three thousand miles to the Pacific was declared officially closed only in 1890. In the hard rough life of the frontier manners and culture find no home. As Pastorius, the most learned man who came to America before 1700, said, "never have metaphysics or Aristotelian logic earned a loaf of bread."

When one is busy killing Indians, clearing the forest, and trekking farther westward every decade, a strong arm, an axe, and a rifle are worth more than all the culture of all the ages. Not only has the frontiersman no leisure or opportunity to acquire manners and culture but, because of their apparent uselessness, and in true class spirit, he comes to despise them. They are effete, effeminate, whereas he and his fellows are the "real men." The well-dressed, cultivated gentleman becomes the "dude," object of derision, who, so far from exerting any ameliorating social or intellectual influence, is heartily looked down upon; and culture itself is relegated to idle women as something with which no real man would concern himself.

These are some of the special attributes of American democracy, and of any democracy in a new land, which it shows in addition to those it would show in any case merely as democracy. In America it was slow in gathering into its hands the reins of power. For many generations the English aristocratic tradition in part survived, and it may be recalled that we were a part of the British Empire for a longer period than we have been independent. In general, the "appeal to the people" throughout the colonial period and the years of the early republic was an appeal to "the best people" only. The first two presidents, Washington and Adams, were as little democratic in doctrine as they were by nature. Jefferson's doctrinal democracy was largely offset in practice by his being an aristocrat to his finger tips by nature, and it was not until Andrew Jackson that "the people" in the democratic sense came into their own. At his inaugural reception in the White House his followers climbed upon the silken chairs in their muddy boots to get a look at him, rushed the waiters to grab champagne, broke the glasses, and in the joy of victory gave a number of ladies bloody noses, and even the President himself had to be rescued from

his admirers and hurried out through a back door. This historic episode may be taken to mark the turning-point in American manners. These people had made a president. Thereafter their tastes would form one of the national influences.

#### IV

It is this new democracy, a hundred times richer and a shade less raw, which is in the saddle to-day. What has it done in the way of influencing manners and thought? Leaving all else aside, even at the risk of drawing a false picture, we shall consider only those points which may help to answer our first question. For one thing, then, it has knocked the dignity of its elected officials into a cocked hat. Leaving out of the scene many of its chosen, such as the mayor of Chicago or its favorite, Bryan, it forces men to play the mountebank and, whatever the character of the man himself, to appear as one of "the people." Washington was a very human man but he never forgot that he was a gentleman. He was adored by his soldiers, but he won their deep affection without ever for a moment losing the dignity of his character and manner. One has only to imagine what would have happened had a group of his men shouted "Atta Boy, Georgie!" to realize the gulf between his day and ours. When John Quincy Adams was president, he declined to attend a county fair in Maryland, remarking privately that he did not intend that the president of the United States should be made a side-show at a cattle fair. To-day, the people insist that the president be a side-show; and Roosevelt, with amused understanding, in his cowboy suit and his rough-rider uniform, used his "properties" as does an actor. Even the supremely conventional Coolidge had to dress up in a ten-gallon hat and chaps, although utterly out of character, and looking so. Just as I write these lines, my attention is called to an announcement in large type in this morning's *New York Times*

that it will publish next Sunday "photographs of Herbert Hoover in workaday clothes and a panorama of his ranch." So he, too, is cast for the comedy. Democracy cracks the whip, and even the most conservative of candidates and officials must dance. In the campaign of 1916 it is said that Hughes was politely asked to shave his beard to suit the people. He balked and consented only so far as to trim it. But then, he lost the election.

The people want officials in their own image. Such men as Elihu Root, Joseph Choate, or John Hay are rarely elected, only appointed. To get anywhere in elective politics one must be a "good mixer," and to be a good mixer one must shed a good part of one's culture and a good part of one's manners. Dignity to a considerable degree must be discarded. One must conceal one's knowledge of English and learn the vernacular, except for "orations." Henry Adams, when he became a newspaper correspondent in Washington, said that he had to "learn to talk to Western congressmen, and to hide his own antecedents." It is what every gentleman who desires to take part in elective public life on a large or small stage in the country to-day has to do to some extent except for happy accidents.

Our democracy has fostered education, at least to the extent of almost fabulously increasing the numbers of the reading public. What has been, for the purpose of the present argument, the effect of that? There has been one effect, at least, germane to this discussion. It has greatly lowered the tone of our public press. Such newspaper men as I know agree with me that there has been a most marked decline even in the last twenty years, and they agree with me as to the cause. In the old days a newspaper was largely a personal organ, and what appeared in it reflected for good or ill upon the editor who was known by name to all its readers. In New York the *Sun* was Charles A. Dana. The *Tribune* was Horace Greeley. To-day

we know no editors, only owners. The newspaper of to-day aims only at circulation, and with every increase in circulation the quality has to be lowered. The case is well known of the purchaser a few years ago of what had been one of the country's most distinguished journals, who told his staff that thereafter they would have to "cut the highbrow" and write down to the level of the increased public he intended to go after. First the "yellow press," then the tabloids, taught the older newspapers what fortunes awaited those who would stoop to pick them up by catering to the masses. One of the worst tabloids has a circulation of a million copies a day. A newspaper depends on its advertising for its profits. Advertising quantity and rates depend on circulation. Increased circulation spells decreased quality. There is the vicious circle which has been drawn for us by the huge mob which has become literate but not educated.

The discovery of the possibilities of mass circulation has caused the advertisers to raise their demands. Some will not advertise at all in journals with a circulation of less than half a million. Advertising is withdrawn from those journals which heroically venture to maintain their quality at the expense of not increasing their circulation. Financial ruin usually results. The people are evidently getting the kind of papers they want but in doing so they are depriving the cultured class of the sort *they* want, and used to get before America became so "educated." We get foreign cables about the Prince of Wales dancing with Judy O'Grady, or the doings of sex perverts in Berlin, and the treatment of our domestic news is beneath contempt. The other night I examined what used to be one of the leading papers not only in New York but in the whole country and I found no headline on three consecutive pages which did not refer to scandal or to crime. It has been said that the new reading public has not interfered with the old, that there are simply vast numbers of new readers of a

different type who are being supplied with what they want. That is not wholly true, and the competition of the new market has had a heavily detrimental influence on the older journals. To-day if a man wishes to succeed in a journalistic career on the daily press he has to scrap even more of his qualities as a gentleman and a scholar than he has to in a career of politics.

The democratic spread of education has also had detrimental effects in other ways. The necessity of finding instruction for the enormous numbers who now go to school, high school, and college has caused a demand for teachers which has far outrun the supply of those qualified to teach. Great numbers of these teachers have even less social and cultural background than have their students. Under them the students may learn the facts of some given subject, but they gain nothing in breadth of culture or even in manners. It is an old story that Charles Eliot Norton once began a lecture at Harvard by saying, "I suppose that none of you young men has ever seen a gentleman." The remark was hyperbolic, as was intended, but it is only too likely to-day that many young men can go through some of our newer "institutions of learning" without seeing at least what used to be called a gentleman. In the professions, more particularly medicine and law, complaint is rampant that they are being swamped by young men who know only the facts of the profession (when they know those) and have no cultural, ethical, or professional standards. A few such could be ignored. When they come, as they are coming now, in shoals, they lower the tone of the whole profession and, without standards themselves, force an unfair competition upon those who try to maintain them.

## V

Perhaps the greatest pressure on the individual to force him to be wary of how he appears to others is in business, for the overwhelming mass of Americans

are in the varied ranks of business of some sort or another. One who has reached the top and "made his pile" may, perhaps, do more or less as he pleases, subject only to milder forms of social pressure; but for those on the way the road is beset with pitfalls. Nearly every man wants to make himself popular with his employers, his fellow-workers, his office superiors, or his customers. These are made up of all sorts of men, but the sprinkling of gentlemen and scholars among them is so slight as to be almost negligible for the purpose of helping one's advancement. In America, to an extent known nowhere else, organization is used for every purpose. It is hardly too much to say that there can hardly be an American who is not a member of from one to a dozen organizations, ranging from Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Red Men, Masons, Mechanics, the Grange, and dozens more, to Bar Associations, Bankers' Clubs, and social and country clubs innumerable. Some of the larger corporations, notably the banks and trust companies in New York, now have clubs made up entirely of members of their own staffs, with obvious intent. In many lines of business the effect produced by one's personality at the annual "convention" is of prime importance. For business reasons it is essential that men should be at least moderately popular at all such organizations or meetings. On an unprecedented scale, tacitly understood but not openly acknowledged, there is competition for personal popularity. In many lines, such as stock brokerage where the service is almost wholly personal, it is needful to "play with your customers," the necessity varying not with their social congeniality but with the size of their account. In salesmanship of all sorts the results of the "personal approach" are, of course, of the first importance.

In order to gain popularity with a very large proportion of business men, many of whom have to-day risen from nothing to riches since the War, one thing is fundamentally necessary. You must

never appear to be superior even if you are. Too perfect an accent in English may be almost as dangerous as a false one in Latin used to be in the House of Lords. To display a knowledge or taste in art or literature not possessed by your "prospect" may be fatal. On the whole, it is safest to plump yourself down to his level at once whatever that may be, to talk his talk, and only about what he talks. This pressure of the majority on one's personal tastes was amusingly exemplified to me the other day when I was looking for a house to rent in a pleasant Jersey suburb. In the house shown me—as is the case in all the suburbs I know—there was nothing to mark where my lawn might end and my neighbor's begin. All was as open to the public gaze as the street itself. I thought of delightful English or French gardens, surrounded by hedge or wall, screened from the public, where one could putter absurdly over one's plants, read one's book, or have one's supper as much to one's self as in the house. In fact they are out-door rooms, infinitely more attractive than the American "sun parlor." I knew well that no such attempt could be made here, but, nevertheless, I remarked to the "realtor" that it would be pleasant to have a hedge and privacy but I supposed it could not be done on account of the neighbors. "I say No," he answered with pained surprise, "if you are going to be 'high hat' you won't last long here." Just so, and so many things in this country are "high hat" which in other lands simply make for sane and cultivated living that it is no wonder that the business man whose car and cellarette, if not bread and butter, depend so often on his popularity, has to walk warily.

Just why having a garden-wall, speaking one's native tongue correctly, or being able to discriminate in matters of art or literature should be the Gallic equivalent of "high hat" would puzzle a Frenchman, but so it often is in the land of the free. And no one knows his way about the land of the free better than

the business man. The pressure may vary with his position and the kind of business he is in, but in general he will soon discover that in any business where personal contact is a factor, the people with whom he deals and upon whose good will he has to lean will insist upon his not being too different from themselves. In Greenwich Village a man may wear a flowing tie and a Spanish hat but it would be suicidal for a bond broker. One has to conform or one is lost. Our two most successful business men are perhaps John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford. Rockefeller says it is a "religious duty" to make as much money as you can, and Ford has informed us that "history is bunk." The one standard of success in business—and perhaps its stark and easily grasped simplicity is what attracts many Americans—is the amount of money you make from it. There are no foolish nuances. Most Americans are business men. Whatever ideals they may have had in college, and to a considerable extent whatever manners they may have inherited or acquired, they begin to shed, unless their niche is an unusually sheltered one, when the real nature of the excoriating modern business competition dawns upon them. Little by little as they "learn the game" they conform to their customers or associates.

## VI

Another characteristic of American life is its extreme mobility. People move up and down in the social scale and round about the country like bubbles in a boiling kettle. Social life everywhere here is in constant flux. I left Wall Street, where I was in business, and a certain suburb where I then lived, fifteen years ago. To-day the personnel of "the Street" as I remember it is almost as completely changed as are the symbols on the ticker. In the suburb where I once knew everyone, at least by name, I know scarcely half a dozen households. People are forever making or losing money, arriving in new social sets, living

in Pittsburgh or a mining camp one year and in Los Angeles or St. Paul the next. This has a marked effect on social independence. When a family has lived for many generations in the same place, or, as have many county families in England for centuries, they acquire a social position almost wholly independent of their individual members at a given time. Indeed, a member is almost an accident and may be as erratic and independent as he pleases. He still remains a so-and-so of so-and-so, known to all the countryside. An old hereditary title accomplishes the same result. Here and there in New England villages or in the South there are families who approximate this happy condition, but in the constant movement of the life of most Americans it is necessary for them to depend wholly upon the effect of their personalities and bank accounts. A man whose family has lived in the "big house" in a small Massachusetts town for a century or two is sufficiently "somebody" there almost to be independent; but should business require him to move to Kalamazoo he is nobody until he "shows them." The social reputation, immunity, and freedom which long residence in one place gives without effort or thought has to be built again from the ground up, and warily, when one moves to another town where they know not Joseph. One joins the organizations in the new town, and, again, one conforms. To begin in a new place by being "different" is dangerous; to begin by being too superior, even if actually, unconsciously, and with no wish to appear so, may be fatal. Like myself, had I gone to that Jersey suburb and made a little privacy round my garden, the newcomer might be voted "high hat" and not "last long."

In assuming the "mucker pose" the gentleman and scholar does not, of course, descend as low as the "mucker" but he does, in self-defense, for the sake of peace and quiet, for business success, and for the sake of not offending the motley crowd of all sorts whom his neighbors are apt to be in the seething,

changing society everywhere to-day, shed enough of his own personality not to offend the average. He avoids whatever others may think "high hat" in manners or culture as he would the plague. Like Henry Adams he will find himself hiding his antecedents if they happen to be better than the neighbors'.

This possible answer to my friends' question does not necessarily indict democracy and American life. Both have brought new values into the world of other sorts. I am merely pointing to one of the possible losses. For it is a loss when a man deliberately uses worse manners than he knows how to use, when he tries to cover up his intellectual abilities, or when he tries to be average when he is above it. A business-democracy has accomplished a great task in levelling up the material condition of its people. It may be asked, however, whether there is no danger of a levelling down of manners and culture. Perhaps the new values gained offset the old ones in some danger of being lost, but it may, even in America, be left to one to question, to ponder, and to doubt. Is the mucker pose really forced on one? People adopt it, evidently, because they think it is the thing to do and essential to make them quickly popular. It does not always work, even in business. A dignified man of science was recently explaining to an applicant for a position some new research work he had been doing. The young Ph.D. was intensely interested. When the scientist concluded he asked the flower of our highest university training what he thought of it. "Hot Dog!" was the immediate and enthusiastic answer, which, in this case, promptly blasted the young man's career in *that* laboratory. It would not have done so generally, however, and we come back to business as conducted to-day, and the character and background of our business leaders as, perhaps, the main contributing cause of forcing the mucker pose.

We can prate as we like about the idealism of America, but it is only money

success which really counts. What are ideals or culture or charming manners as compared with business? What do two leaders of opinion at this moment tell us, one from the Pacific and the other from the Atlantic coast? Mr. Hoover, in his address replying to the welcome given him by the people of San Francisco, told them that the most precious possession of their great city was—what?—*their foreign trade!* In New York, the *Sun* in its editorial explaining its intention to support the Republican party, admitted that the prohibition question is "a live campaign topic," and that present conditions may be "intolerable" and "a morass of lawbreaking," but asks whether it is well to risk loss of prosperity for the possible reform of those conditions. In America to-day business life is not the basis for a rational social life but social life is manipulated as the basis for an irrational business one. One makes acquaintances and tries for popularity in order to get ahead downtown. To an unprecedented extent the people who have money in all lines of business are newcomers from far down in the social scale, men with no culture and no background, and often no manners. We may note our new class of multi-millionaire landlords who have built fortunes out of shoe-strings since the War. Two of our now greatest industries have been wholly evolved in the last two decades, and one certainly does not look for culture among the kings in the motor and moving-picture trades. The "people" who came into political power under Jackson made a huge grab at economic power under Grant, but it has been reserved for the present to "make the world safe for democracy." The old class which had inherited manners and culture as essential to an ordered life has abdicated mainly for mere lack of funds. In business for the last decade it has been for the most part the conservatives, who had much to lose, who have lost, and the reckless who have won.

Business may explain the mucker pose,

but it may be asked whether those who adopt it are not traitors to all that is best in the world and which has been so hardly built up. An impoverished aristocrat may sell his title in marriage for one generation to rehabilitate his house, but Americans who sell their culture and their breeding to truckle to the unbred in business, who shed these things of the

spirit for motor cars and all the rest of the things of the body, are taking refuge in a yet more ignominious surrender. They may thus pick up some of the golden drippings from the muckers' tables, but they do not gain the respect of the muckers whom they imitate and may yet awake to the fact that they have properly forfeited even their own.

## PENELOPE

BY HENRIETTE DE SAUSSURE BLANDING

## I

**W**HITE as a gull, light as an April cloud,  
 Her hands rest idly at an idle loom.  
 The thread is slack that wove Laertes' shroud  
 Against the hour of spiritual doom.  
 Wan torches etch a black arc on these walls  
 Where the great bow leans to the pillared fir.  
 Calm now the ruinous clamor of her halls  
 Where the Achæans strove in suit of her.  
 Eurymachus lies stark as very bone,  
 Whiter than memory of her lovers' ghosts.  
 Close by the ordered hearth he sits alone  
 Whose spear did battle with the Trojan hosts.  
 Her eyes ask only if this dream be born  
 Of new sawn ivory or of polished horn.

## II

She will await his sure necessity  
 As young narcissus waits the warm spring rain's  
 Renewal of being. Ithaca's dark sea  
 Strewing her desolate shore with bleached remains  
 Of gunwale and mast will never strike her cold  
 With Sundered rudder that may have known his hand.  
 She has forgotten the pain long nights may hold  
 Grudging her bleak security of land.  
 Telemachus watches, silent, pondering  
 Sorrow dissolved as snows upon the tide  
 Of a thawing river. She marvels, wondering  
 If this be he who loved her, who has died,  
 Who is come home, home from the beakèd ships,  
 No shadow of Helen now between their lips.